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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

It's been another of "those" weeks! The stress levels at work just won't seem to die down. I'm not sure what the cause is, but I do know that there just doesn't seem to be enough time to get things done. There always seems to be an emergency that needs attention or someone needs help, or something. Of course, all of these things occur and do require resolution. However, it seems like more and more of these episodes occur, leaving one to have to find ways to get the normal routines accomplished. I'm sure you've all faced similar situations. It can be frustrating day after day after day!

We lucked out here in New England with the recent spate of hurricanes that hit the Southeast, but fizzled out before getting to us. The weather really hasn't been bad lately. A little cool, but nice for this time of year and certainly better than the rash of heat waves we had this past summer. I think I may get a chance for one or two more golf outings before the weather gets too cold, or my wife puts her foot down; I'm not sure which will occur first!

Well, there's really not a lot going on these days. I think I'll head over to eBay to continue my search for some more nostalgia from my college days. So far, I've been fairly lucky and made some good buys (and lost a few along the way!).

Until next time...

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Ultimate Muzak Demo 8730 Released

The largest music demo over all time has been released. No less than 4646 Atari ST tunes collected into a huge music demo.

There are also a long tour of the Atari ST chip music over a dozen years. From the first games to the latest TAO techniques. A real pearl.

You can download the UMD8730 from these places:

http://phf.atari.org/ and
http://www.dhs.nu/

Atari800 Mac OS-X Emulator Updated

The new Atari800 emulator for Macintosh OSX has been updated, version 0.2.1 It now features a full Cocoa interface, with native menus, preferences, file associations, help and more. It is still a beta release, as it has had a limited number of official testers, but it has come a long, long way.

http://members.cox.net/atarimac/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho, friends and neighbors. Well, autumn is really here now in New England. THIS is the kind of weather that I like. There's just something about a brisk morning that wakes me up and gives me the feeling that it's actually going to be a good day.

I know that things like a preference for a particular season are just that... preferences. And I don't expect everyone to agree with me. It's probably a good thing that there are four seasons to choose from. That way, most of us can at least say that we enjoy SOMETHING.

There are, of course, those who can find something wrong with anything, and that holds true for the seasons of the year too. "Summer's too hot", "Winter's too cold", Spring bothers my allergies", and "Autumn just means that I've got to rake leaves" are all things you'll hear if you ask a group what their favorite season is.

Sure, someone will say "winter, because the snow looks so pretty", or "summer, because it's beach weather", but by and large, you'll hear more about what season ISN'T their favorite.

Part of the problem is that many people have forgotten to think about what they DO like. We've become programmed to deal with problems these days. Problems at work, problems at home, problems GETTING to work, relationships, bills, and all the rest of modern life is presented to us as one obstacle after another. We've forgotten to pay attention to the good parts of what's going on.

So the next time you get stuck in traffic or find out at the last minute that you have to work late, take a second to think about some of the good stuff. Hell, think about the fun you've had with your Atari computers. All the hours of zapping asteroids and demons, all the hours of chatting with friends whose only common interest was the brand of computer they

used, and all the hours you've spent pouring over A-ONE to see what's happening out there.

No, it's not a miracle cure, and the obstacles will still be there when you "come back", but for a moment... just for a moment, nothing seems so bad that it can't be overcome.

Okay, I'll step down off the soapbox... for this week. <grin>

Let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'Jon' asks about restoring icons on the desktop:

"It's been such a long time since I've used an ST, that I can't remember what to do if you lose all your desktop icons. Anyone help me on this one? One of my hard drives will boot, load all the acc's and give me a desktop, with no icons."

Mark Bedingfield gives Jon some possibilities:

"Which version of TOS? If its 2 or higher, just select install drives from the drop down menu. If its TOS 1, click on an existing icon and select install icon. Then change the drive letter to suit. Easy eh?"

Jon tells Mark:

"That's my problem, it's TOS 1.02 and there are no icons whatsoever on the desktop..."

Steve Marshall tells Jon that he...

"Dunno. But I'd try loading from a floppy and saving the desktop."

Mark adds:

"You need to delete desktop.inf from your BOOT drive. With TOS 1.02 unless you hand edit the inf you can't set up any icons. Boot off a floppy with a hard disk driver and delete it that way."

Jon replies:

"Thanks for the input Mark. I managed to find out the drive was pretty much trashed when I got it. Nothing I tried worked. I couldn't get past the auto boot nor could I uninstall it. So, I formatted the drive and watched as AHDI flaked out on mapping the sectors. I then reformatted and told it not to map and it was fine. Is this a "feature" of the Megafile 60?

Man, the things you forget when you haven't worked with a machine like this in a long time. I almost forgot what fun was. Like bamboo shoots under the nails!

Thanks again, and it feels good to be back in the Atari scene again!"

Paul Nurminen posts this about a cable "tech" show:

"I don't know if TechTV is available anywhere else but North America,

but even if it’s not, Atari users here should be interested in this post.

For those of you who aren’t familiar with TechTV, it’s a cable television network all about technology, computers, etc. There are many indvidual shows on the channel, the most popular being a show called "The Screen Savers". It’s basically a computer show, where they feature information on new stuff, tech help, tips, web site features, etc.

In their most recent show, they mentioned at the end that they noticed that about 5% of the people who visit the TechTV/Screen Savers web site are using Atari computers, and they want to know how!
:-)

And here’s what they posted recently on their site:

"Got Atari?
We’ve received statistics that a few brave souls out there visit this very site using Atari computers (STs, we’re guessing.) If you’re one of those souls, email Joshua Brentano. We’d like to feature you on the site and/or show."

(by the way, this guy’s e-mail address is: joshua@techtv.com)

So, I’m planning to e-mail them myself, since I still use my Falcon daily (although not much for web surfing these days). But I think we really need some more of you who are actively using your STs or Falcons on the Internet (and Hades users too I suppose). This show would be a great way to get the word out about Atari users, and how we’re still going strong. I’m sure they would be quite surprised to see what we’re still capable of doing with Atari computers.

So, send an e-mail to the address above, or visit the TechTV / Screen Savers web site if you want to find out more about them. And by the way, here is the specific link where they posted the request for Atari users to contact them (about half way down the page):

http://www.techtv.com/screensavers/shownotes/story/0,24330,3401453,00.html

And for what it’s worth, I have no connection to TechTV, or "The Screen Savers". It’s just that I think it would be really cool to see some Atari hardware and software featured on their show. Heck, in the past, they have done segments on Atari video games, and emulation, and the main host (Leo Laporte) has mentioned many times that he has fond memories of Atari computers, as his first computer was an Atari 8-bit.

So, let’s all send them an e-mail. Who knows, maybe we’ll even be asked to be on the show?

Kenneth Medin tells Paul:

"Hm, I guess they would be even more surprised to know that it’s not only possible to browse but also _serve_ the web with any ST with 4 MB RAM (maybe 2, haven’t checked).

Guess I should mail them so they can try out how it feels to browse on an Atari web sever :-)"

Rod Smith tells Kenneth:

"Just be aware that Tech TV demos don't always go according to plan. For instance, if you give them a URL to an ST Web server and they try it on the show, the ST could come off looking really bad if there were some unrelated network congestion at the moment. (The show is nominally "live," although it's repeated in taped form several times a day, so there's no chance to try again later in the event of a problem like that.) Of course, if the ST Web server is hooked up to their LAN, the chances of such a problem will be greatly minimized."

Brian Roland asks about using a modem under GEMulator:

"Anyone know if there is a way to get STik to use a baud rate higher than 19200 under Gemulator 2000 with TOS 2.06? I've tried HSMODEM07, and it simply freezes."

Kenneth Medin tells Brian:

"Do not use any variant of serial fixers like HSMODEM as Gemulator is an emulator...

In the Gemulator properties page you will find "Fast baud rates". Check this box and Gemulator will use the slow 50, 75, 300 bps etc settings to simulate higher ones like 57600 and 115200 bps. I do not remember which "slow speeds" that gives which "high speeds" but perhaps its the same as within HSMODEM that has the same function.

I have used an older version of STinG with Gemulator with great success in this way. I think STik can be used as well, but I have not tried..."

Charles Richmond asks about archiving floppies:

"I have literally a medium sized cardboard box full of
Atari ST floppy diskettes that I need to archive onto
a CD-R. I should be able to read the disks alright,
either with my ST or an older Mac...and the CD-R will
be in ISO-9600 format.

My question is: Does there exist a "disk image" format
that I should use for each disk...maybe a .dsk format???
I will probably have room to put each disk on the CD-R
more than once..."

Hallvard Tangeraas tells Charles:

"Sounds like me a couple of years ago. I had loads of floppies, and didn't use a fraction of the stuff -simply because I didn't even know about most of the stuff.

With a CD it's so much easier as you have everything in one place.

I'm not sure why you would need to create disk images of the files. I had a huge box of floppies in addition to stuff I had downloaded from the Internet and transferred it all over to a CD-R disc uncompressed. Given the small size of Atari software (compared to equivalent Mac or PC software) I saw no need to waste time compressing things.

The good thing about this is that I can actually run software directly from the CD before copying it over to the hard disk. Very handy if you're not completely sure which program you want!

I spent a great deal of time planning how to set the CD up, and ended up with many categories ("TEXTEDIT", "FILE", "DISK", "AUDIO", "GRAPHIC", "PRINTER" etc.), which makes it very easy for me to find stuff.
I also took care to stick to the 8+3 naming format so that it will be compatible with a standard ST.

Since I have a Mac running MagiCMac (the Macintosh version of the Atari multitasking operating system "MagiC") I can pop in the CD, then use or copy the files I need to the hard disk. I've also tried it on a CD-ROM drive connected to my STe, and it worked perfectly.

And since I spent so much time on the CD I made sure that I burnt an extra copy for backup in case the first CD goes bad. Actually, I make two copies of every data CD I burn.
I don't have any CD-burning software on the Atari ST, so I have no experience there, but did it with "Toast" on the Mac, using the ISO-9660 format."

Derryck Croker adds:

"All I did was make a folder for each disk, with perhaps a Disk1 etc folder within if it was a multi-disk set, and just copy the floppy disk contents over (this is all on a spare partition which will get copied in one go).

No need for anything else unless you're trying to copy protected stuff, someone else will have to advise on that."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Monkey Ball 2' Keeps Rolling!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Developers Put Linux On Xbox!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

'Monkey Ball 2' Keeps Fun Rolling

You might not be able to teach old dogs new tricks, but monkeys pick them up like sponges.

When last we saw the eponymous stars of Sega’s Super Monkey Ball, they knew how to cross hazardous platforms, hang glide, race, box, bowl, golf and play billiards.

One year later, in Super Monkey Ball 2 (* * out of four; $49.99, from Nintendo for GameCube, rated for all ages), the apes of wrath have added baseball, tennis, dogfighting, boating, soccer and target practice to their already burgeoning set of skills.

The main challenge in Super Monkey Ball 2 involves steering the monkeys across elevated platforms while avoiding pneumatic pistons, bouncing barriers and holes. Frankly, this gets old after a while.

Fortunately, Super Monkey Ball 2 also has 12 "party games" -- mini games that can be played by as many as four players at once. The holdovers from the first title -- hang gliding, boxing, racing, golf, bowling and billiards -- are freebies. The hang-gliding game, for example, involves picking up coins, stars and bananas in midair, then trying to land on targets for points.

The new games, which are unlocked by scoring points in the main game, are a mixed bag. Monkey Boat, a racing game in which you paddle down a river, takes some getting used to but is fun.

Monkey Dogfighting, a game in which the monkeys fly through the air and stalk each other with pineapple missiles and machine guns, is hugely entertaining. Monkey Baseball is a revision of the old electro-mechanical baseball game in which you try to bat balls up ramps to score hits.

Monkey Tennis, Monkey Soccer and Monkey Shot are a bit dull.

Despite the somewhat uneven value of its party games, Super Monkey Ball 2 is a good collection that offers great playability.

Developers Put Linux on Xbox

A group of developers has released a version of Linux for Microsoft’s Xbox game console in Europe, promising to turn the device into a fully-featured PC.

Developed by a German group called h07.org, the distribution for the Xbox is based on MandrakeSoft SA’s Mandrake 9.0 Linux.

The Xbox-Linux project takes advantage of the fact that the Xbox hardware architecture is very similar to that of a PC, with a 733-MHz Intel Pentium III, 64MB of RAM, and an 8GB hard disk. A keyboard and mouse can be added through the console’s USB ports, the developers said in a statement.

Its near-PC construction makes the game console a target for hardware hobbyists. A student from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in June claimed to have cracked the Xbox’s security system, potentially allowing users to run any software on the system.

To run Linux, the Xbox requires an extra chip known as a mod chip to be

installed on the main circuit board, a modification that Microsoft believes enables users to circumvent copyright protection on games.

The 350MB installation is compatible with the PC version of Mandrake Linux 9, which was released last week. It contains the graphical environments Gnome and KDE, as well as such software packages as OpenOffice.org, Gimp, Evolution, and Mozilla.

The developers said that mod chips are not illegal in Europe if they are not used with pirated software. The developers are also working on an alternative ROM that will contain no Microsoft code and won't permit running pirated games, according to the statement.

There are two ways to use Linux on the Xbox. One method uses the Xbox's own XBE bootloader, in which case Linux is then started as if it was a game, either from CD or from hard disk. Xbox games can still be played in this configuration.

The ROM method completely replaces the Xbox system software, so that games can no longer be played, but the whole hard disk can be used for Linux and the system boots more quickly.

Microsoft representatives in Australia have previously said the company is investigating legal options to stop distribution of mod chips for the Xbox.

The gaming community is currently full of rumors that Microsoft has succeeded in closing down one of the best-known mod chip retailers, Hong Kong-based Lik Sang, after taking legal action against the company.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

MacWorld Returns to Boston in 2004

Boston has beaten out New York to host the Macworld show starting in 2004, a major victory for a city that has struggled to book clients for its new convention center.

Beth Wickenhiser, a spokeswoman for IDG World Expo, which runs Macworld, confirmed Tuesday that the show would be held in Boston from 2004-2006, with the option for a two-year extension.

She declined to provide details but said they would be announced next week. IDG World Expo's decision was first reported in the Boston Herald.

Macworld pulled out of Boston in 1998, but IDG World Expo head and Macworld organizer Charlie Greco later indicated that he was interested in returning the convention to Boston, partly to save money.

That prompted heavy lobbying efforts by New York and Boston, with both

cities offering packages of perks.

The $800 million convention center under construction near downtown, set to open in 2004, has attracted only a few bookings and has been criticized as a waste of money.

Macworld, which is expected to attract 64,000 people, could pump tens of millions of dollars into the local economy. The show is one of the premier events in the computer industry and usually features product announcements and speeches by Apple Computer Inc. senior executives.

Webcasters May Get Royalties Relief

Smaller Internet music broadcasters would owe thousands of dollars less in copyright royalty payments under rate revisions the U.S. House unanimously approved Monday.

If the revisions become law, the webcasters would get a few more years of reprieve from per-song, per-listener payments that they complain could put them out of business when royalties become due Oct. 20.

The revisions in the House bill were based on a last-minute deal reached between the webcasters and the recording industry Sunday after nearly a week of intense negotiations.

The deal, which still needs Senate and presidential approval, lets smaller webcasters like Ultimate-80s calculate rates based on the size of their cash flow.

Larger and medium-sized webcasters would still have to pay a fee based on songs played and the size of their audience.

The smaller webcasters say they were generating little revenue to begin with and would need larger audiences to attract more advertising dollars. But as they built audiences under the old formula, they say, royalty payments would proportionally increase, making their businesses impossible to build.

"A station like Ultimate-80s would have to pay for its own success," founder David Landis said.

The per-song formula, already slashed in half by the U.S. Copyright Office in June, amounted to 70 cents for every song heard by 1,000 listeners, retroactive to 1998. Landis estimates that would cost him $24,000.

Under the revisions, he and other webcasters earning $1 million or less since 1998 have the option of paying the greater of $2,000 per year of operation, 8 percent of gross revenues or 5 percent of expenses. Landis estimates he’d owe $7,700, a savings of more than $16,000.

In either case, the fees are split between the recording labels and musicians, who say they must be fairly compensated when others build businesses based on their works.

The deal lets some webcasters continue paying as a percentage of revenues or expenses until 2004.

Kevin Shively, director of interactive media for Beethoven.com, said the revised rates "provide some relief for a significant number of webcasters" but will still be tough for webcasters to pay, even with installments allowed for some.

"It’s very difficult for any company to negotiate under threat of being forced out of business," Shively said. "When you do that you can’t be expected to get the terms you are fully comfortable with."

The Recording Industry Association of America called the new rates the product of a compromise that should ultimately benefit fans.

Ann Chaitovitz, director of sound recordings for the American Federation of Television & Radio Artists, also praised the deal, even if it means smaller fees for artists.

Traditional radio broadcasters have been exempt from paying royalties to recording labels and performance artists on grounds the broadcasts had promotional value.

The recording labels were able to win royalty payments in a copyright law passed in 1998, when many of today’s webcasters weren’t in existence yet.

An arbitration panel proposed rates of $1.40 per song heard by 1,000 listeners, and the U.S. Copyright Office halved them in June and set an Oct. 20 deadline for payments.

Legislation sponsored by House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis. would have postponed that deadline for six months but was pulled last week to encourage negotiations.

Web Site Fights Copyrights, Royalties

Mickey Mouse’s days at Disney could be numbered and paying royalties for warbling George Gershwin tunes could become a thing of the past if the U.S. Supreme Court sides with an Internet publisher in a landmark copyright case this week.

The high court will hear the case Wednesday that could plunge the earliest images of Disney’s mascot and other closely held creative property into the public domain as early as next year.

If upheld, the precedent-setting challenge could cost movie studios and heirs of authors and composers millions of dollars in revenue as previously protected material becomes available free of charge.

At issue is a 1998 law that extended copyright protection an additional 20 years for cultural works, thereby protecting movies, plays, books and music for a total of 70 years after the author’s death or for 95 years from publication for works created by or for corporations.

The law was almost immediately challenged by Stanford University law professor Lawrence Lessig on behalf of Eric Eldred, who had been posting work by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James and others on his Web site.

The plaintiffs lost their case at trial and then on appeal but stunned many observers by persuading the Supreme Court to hear the case.

"Nobody has ever attacked the extension of copyright before," said Lionel Sobel, editor of the Entertainment Law Review. He said the Internet has pumped up the demand for images that are now protected.

"Now we have thousands of people who want to create a Web site and would like to have ready access to a whole library of materials," Sobel said.

The Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998 was sponsored by late Rep. Sonny Bono and quickly became known as the "Mickey Mouse Extension Act" because of aggressive lobbying by Disney, whose earliest representations of its squeaky-voiced mascot were set to pass into the public domain in 2003.

The impact of the law extends far beyond corporations. Small music publishers, orchestras and even church choirs that can’t afford to pay high royalties to perform some pieces said they suffer by having to wait an additional 20 years for copyrights to expire.

Compositions such as Gershwin’s "Rhapsody in Blue," which would have passed into the public domain in 1998, now are protected until 2018 at least. Books by Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald also were due to become public property.

Lessig claims Congress acted unconstitutionally by extending copyright protection 11 times over the past 40 years. The plaintiffs contend the Constitution grants Congress the right to grant copyright protection for a limited time and that the Founding Fathers intended for copyrights to expire so works could enter the public domain and spark new creative efforts to update them.

The plaintiffs also claim that by extending copyright protection retroactively, Congress has in effect made copyright perpetual largely in response to corporate pressure.

The government and groups representing movie studios and record labels argue that the Constitution gives Congress, not the courts, the job of balancing the needs of copyright holders and the public, especially in the face of new technology.

Backers of the extension also argue that the Internet and digital reproduction of movies and music threaten the economic viability of creating those works, thus requiring greater protection.

"This is essentially a dispute about policy dressed up as a Constitutional question," The Walt Disney Co. said in a statement. "Eldred is simply trying to second-guess what Congress has already decided, and we believe the Supreme Court should reject their attempt."

Disney has come under special criticism because the company reaped a fortune making films from such public domain fairy tale characters as "Snow White" and "Cinderella," but is fighting to prevent others from doing the same with characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

Legal experts said it would be unlikely that Disney and other companies would suffer immediate harm if copyrights expire on their movies and characters.

Mickey Mouse, for instance, is not only a character but a corporate trademark, which never expire as long as they are in use.

Only the copyright on the Mickey portrayed in Disney’s earliest films, such as 1928’s "Steamboat Willie," would expire in the next few years. The more rounded, modern mouse familiar today is a later creation and would remain protected for several more years.

Lindows vs. Windows: Court Battle Continues

Software maker Lindows.com said Tuesday that it has filed for a summary judgment in its battle against Microsoft, claiming that the similarities between the Lindows and Windows names do not impede on Microsoft’s copyrights since "windows" is a generic term for a type of software product.

Lindows, which offers a low-cost Linux-based operating system that runs a variety of programs, including applications written for Microsoft’s Windows OS, was originally sued by the Redmond, Washington, software behemoth last year over copyright infringement claims related to the Lindows and Windows names.

San Diego, California-based Lindows claims, however, that "windows" is a generic term, commonly understood by consumers as a key feature of modern graphical user interfaces.

Therefore, Microsoft cannot hold sole claim over the term, Lindows said in its summary judgment request filed October 3 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington.

"Graphical user interfaces that feature the use of the term ’windows’ have, since the late 1970s, been referred to as ’windows programs,’ ’windows interfaces,’ ’windows systems,’ and ’windows managers.’ Thus, the term ’windows’ has been used as a generic term for a category of computer software products for over 20 years," the motion says.

However, responding to the motion Tuesday, Microsoft pokesperson Jim Desler said, "Windows is one of the most highly recognized brands because of years of hard work and billions of dollars in investment." "We will vigorously oppose any attempt to infringe on this trademark or have it diluted by copycat brands," Desler added.

Lindows claimed that it has met the burden of proof in rebutting the validity of Microsoft’s claims in the case and is seeking a summary judgment on all claims asserted by Microsoft, as well as Lindows’ counterclaims.

A Lindows representative could not give a timeline Tuesday on when the motion would be considered, saying it was up to the court.

Microsoft Admits New Licensing Plan Upset Customers

Microsoft Corp. made mistakes when it introduced a new software licensing plan this year that encourages customers to sign up for locked-in upgrades with fixed payments, Chief Executive Steve Ballmer said on Wednesday.

"We still have customers today who tell us, ’Look, we can’t understand

your end-user license agreement. It’s long and complicated. We don’t understand.’ So we’re looking to simplify those," Ballmer said at the Gartner technology conference.

Ballmer said Microsoft would make some changes to the way it sells its software to businesses, after having made mistakes when it introduced a system of locked-in upgrades and fixed payments.

The move, which was the biggest change in licensing in five years for Microsoft, ended up costing some customers more money, which Ballmer said was problematic.

"We know now we’re not going to simplify anything in the way that causes any of the kinds of hardships that we’re seeing financially for some of our customers today," he said.

At the end of July, Microsoft fully implemented a new licensing plan that gave business customers a choice of whether to pay regular installments for the right to upgrade to the latest software at any time, or opt out of the plan and pay full price for a full-version software license later.

Previously, customers bought a license -- the right to use software -- and usually made one-time payments for an upgrade, often at a reduced price.

In addition to the headaches over software licensing, Microsoft is also facing slower sales of its Windows operating system and Office suite of business software.

In an effort to boost flagging sales of its Office suite of productivity programs, Ballmer unveiled on Wednesday a new program to help businesses record, store and retrieve information more efficiently.

Ballmer told the conference that the new document authoring tool, based on an increasingly important Web-based computer language called XML, was one of the key areas for future growth at the company.

When asked during the conference where future growth will come from for Microsoft, Ballmer pointed to XML, which stands for extensible markup language.

"The big breakthrough, even for the Office suite, lies around the notion of XML," Ballmer said.

The popular Web language allows companies to exchange information in a standard way. It will enable workers to collaborate better with each other and receive support services, Ballmer said.

XML is one of the key building blocks for the next generation of software and services that will enable more intelligent documents capable of harnessing information from networks and the Web.

Microsoft’s executives have bet the company on the initiative to blend software and information across a wide ranges of devices, from desktop computers to servers to personal digital assistants, calling it .NET (dot-net).

Microsoft Office product manager Scott Bishop said the new program, code-named XDocs, will debut in mid-2003 as the newest member of the Office suite of software, used for word processing and spreadsheet number-crunching.

XDocs allows users without in-depth knowledge of XML to create forms to record, store and retrieve information more efficiently.

If entered once, such information can be used by a variety of programs, such as Excel, a customer relationship management program and even a Web-based application without tedious reentry. Because XML is Web-based, it can also be shared across the Internet and between different devices.

"Information workers" -- Microsoft's term for the typical office worker who uses computers frequently -- "will be producing XML. They won't know it but they will," Bishop said.

"Most organizations don't feel they're getting the most out of all the information that they have residing on desktops or in servers," Bishop said, "This allows people to contribute as well as consume Web services," he said.

MSN 8 Not Kidding About Security

The latest version of Microsoft's MSN Internet access software, due out later this month, will host a broad range of new parental controls aimed at protecting kids online, in a further sign that the software giant is hoping to edge out competitors by heeding to users' calls for bolstered online security.

Among the new features, users of MSN 8 will be able to filter out Web sites according to age-specific settings, block or limit a child's access to MSN Mail or Messenger, and receive weekly history reports on what sites their children have tried to visit and with whom they've corresponded via e-mail or instant messaging.

Beyond just protecting kids, the updated Internet service incorporates antivirus protection from McAfee.com. MSN 8 will also offer users an upgraded antivirus utility as part of a premium offering, says MSN Director Bob Visse.

Additionally, broadband users will have Network Address Translation firewall software rolled into their service. The range of new security features come as part of the Redmond, Washington, software maker's new trustworthy computing push.

The company previewed the offerings Wednesday in anticipation of the scheduled launch of MSN 8 on October 24. Microsoft is throwing a considerable amount of weight behind the latest version of the Internet access software as it prepares to gun against rival America Online, which is set to release the update to its service, AOL 8.0, next Tuesday.

And although AOL has said that its 8.0 software will also boast new parental controls, Microsoft is calling its offerings the most comprehensive online safety features available from an Internet service provider.

In addition to age-specific filtering and blocking options, MSN has incorporated a Kids Search feature into its new software, which draws on more than 600,000 pre-screened sites appropriate for children, and a Kids Home Page option, offering age-specific games, music, content, and

activities.

The software also includes a Kids Request Line feature, allowing children to ask permission from their parents via e-mail to access Web pages, e-mail addresses, or IM accounts they don’t already have permission to access.

But perhaps more significantly, the software’s new filtering capabilities occur at a network level, meaning that the restrictions are enforced on most other applications and Web browsers.

Ernie Allen, president and chief executive officer of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, previewed the service last week and said that he believed this was an important feature in protecting kids online, given that kids are protected even if they download other applications.

Allen also said that he liked the wide range of filtering options given to parents and the transparency and ease of use of the restrictions.

"We want parents to know that [protecting kids online] is not such a daunting and overwhelming task," Allen said. "And it’s very important."

Visse says that the parental controls are part of the company’s overall trustworthy computing initiative, as well as an effort to stay competitive with AOL.

Although admitting that the company did not offer a lot in terms of parental controls in previous versions of its MSN software, Visse says that he believes MSN 8 is a "deeper and more flexible solution" than those offered by rival services.

"I think it is a big step forward," he says.

China Imposes New Web Cafe Rules

China has imposed strict new limits on Internet cafes, banning minors and demanding that operators keep records of customers and the information they access.

The regulations, which take effect Nov. 15, also impose tougher safety standards for the popular cafes that provide Internet access to users who pay by the session. Smoking is banned, no cafe can operated within 124 feet of a school, and the businesses must close by midnight, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Customers are also prohibited from viewing Internet sites offering gambling, pornography or prostitution.

Many of the regulations, including a requirement to register Internet users, were already on the books in Beijing. But the government added new restrictions and decided to apply them nationwide after an August fire in an Internet cafe in the capital killed 25 people.

But the new rules also reflect the fear of China’s communist leaders that the Internet could nurture subversion.

The regulations ban Internet cafe patrons from accessing a broad array of

politically sensitive Internet sites, including ones that discuss independence movements in Tibet and the western region of Xinjiang or the sovereignty of Taiwan, which China claims as its territory.

The rules also forbid information that "threatens national security or harms national dignity and national interests."

Operators must keep records of users and the sites they access for two months and provide the information on request to police and regulators. Violators face fines equal to $1,800.

Xinhua said the rules aim to bring order to an industry that has expanded rapidly with little regulation.

China has more than 45 million Internet users, most of whom gain access from connections at home or in the office.

Already, China operates a special force to police the Internet for content deemed subversive. Scores of Web sites are blocked due to their content and the search engines Google and AltaVista have been blocked because they permit access to information on the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement and other sensitive topics.

All of Beijing’s Internet cafes were shut after the August fire in a cafe in the capital’s university district that killed 25 people. Other parts of the country followed suit, though most have since allowed them to reopen. Two boys were sentenced to life in prison for setting the fire.

AOL Subscriber Revenue Could Be a Concern

Merrill Lynch analyst Jessica Reif Cohen on Wednesday said the next area of concern for America Online, the Internet unit of AOL Time Warner Inc., could be falling subscription revenue.

Shares of AOL Time Warner, the world’s largest media company, were off 3 percent.

America Online is already suffering from a sharp deterioration in advertising revenue, and subscription revenue may be hitting a peak, Reif Cohen said in a research note.

New ad business at AOL is "hardly replenishing the quickly depleting backlog," she said, adding that advertising could reach a bottom in 2004.

Looking at subscriber revenue, Reif Cohen said, "Our analysis suggests that the AOL broadband (high-speed Internet) offering is far less attractive as compared to the traditional dial-up narrowband service."

As users migrate to high-speed services -- something companies like America Online are aggressively pushing -- AOL’s earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization may erode, she said. The high-speed offerings generate less EBITDA per subscriber than the dial-up business, she said.

"Worst case" analysis suggests that without incremental revenue from broadband Internet services, EBITDA from America Online’s subscription business could fall to $235 million in 2005 from an estimated $850 million in 2003, Reif Cohen said.

America Online’s overall EBITDA would be expected to fall to $830 million in 2005 from $2.3 billion in 2001.

Merrill does not expect the high-speed service to enjoy the same scale economics that dial-up service has because of the steep and potentially growing access fees America Online is required to pay to access cable lines, Reif Cohen said. She added that she does not expect the Internet giant to have the same market share in broadband that it enjoys in the dial-up space, where it is No. 1.

"The ’savior’ for AOL broadband will be the development and acceptance of premium ’HBO-type’ services such as music and/or video subscription," Reif Cohen said.

Merrill Lynch has a "neutral" rating on the stock of AOL Time Warner. Reif Cohen said that while the company’s media assets, such as cable networks, film and publishing, are strong, the online unit remains a concern.

Broadband Speeds at Dial-up Prices?

Artera Group has launched a service called Artera Turbo that promises to boost dial-up speeds by an average of five times, at just $10 a month--and offers a free two-week trial for skeptics.

Artera Turbo works by routing your Internet connection through its own servers, which automatically shrink images, block pop-up and banner ads, and cache popular Web pages. On your PC, Artera Turbo client software performs a handful of other tricks to accelerate surfing, such as optimization of modem settings and additional caching of Web pages on your hard drive so the sites you visit regularly will load even faster

Artera Turbo may increase Web surfing speeds, but its methods typically won’t substantially reduce the time straight file downloads or file transfers take. The service also claims to boost broadband modem speeds, but it’s primary appeal will be with 56k dial-up modem users. Artera Group released a similar service in the spring geared towards small offices, which required additional hardware.

A free trial version of Artera Turbo is available for download.

Installation of the Artera Turbo software is simple: You answer a few questions and follow step-by-step instructions; the software loads onto the system and you’re ready to go.

During an informal test of the service, initial visits to various static Web sites brought pages up just over twice as fast as a regular 56-kbps dial-up modem. Second-time visits to the same sites, however, yielded performance about three times faster than that of a 56-kbps setup.

Whether you’ll benefit from Artera Turbo’s approach depends greatly on your surfing habits and on whether you’re willing to pay for modest speed improvements. Artera Turbo is best suited to people who surf the same Web sites day after day.

The best fit for the service, however, may be with customers of super-cheap ISPs that charge $10 or less per month. For example, pairing budget ISP

NetZero with Artera’s service could cost less than $20 monthly while yielding a faster dial-up experience.

Artera Turbo will find competition from a crop of similar products that have sprouted in recent months. All operate on the premise that the closer data lies on a network (or the Internet), the faster your PC can pull it down. A number of add-on accelerators and other speed-boosting tools--even for broadband connections--are also surfacing.

Propel’s Propel Accelerator and Proxyconn’s Internet Accelerator, for example, are subscription services that route your traffic through their servers to deliver faster Web page surfing.

Propel Accelerator charges a $5 monthly fee and works very similarly to Artera. But Propel can go a step further and block all images on Web pages or turn color images into monochrome ones to make pages load faster. Proxyconn charges $9 monthly and is available as a downloadable service. Version 2.4, released this fall, strips Web sites of banner ads and swats pop-up ads. The company is creating a network of servers at strategic points around the country to bring data closer to your PC.

Is HTML on Its Way Out?

A mere eight years ago, the "HT" in HTML stood as much for "hot" as it did for "hypertext." This language of the Internet was on everyone’s lips, from bedroom coders to boardroom capitalists. Now, though, "X" is slowly starting to mark the hypertext spot as XML, XHTML and other, more sophisticated Internet languages nimbly supplement -- and in some cases supplant -- their older and stodgier cousin.

This is not to say HTML has slipped entirely into the shadows. "It’s very unlikely that HTML is going away soon," Jeff Offutt, an information and software engineering professor at George Mason University, told NewsFactor. "All Web browsers are based on HTML and will be for the foreseeable future."

In a nutshell, HTML "is a way to mark up text and add pictures, links and tables to display content within a Web browser," Mark Frydenberg, a computer information systems instructor at Bentley College, told NewsFactor. "When a Web server receives a request for a page, the page is processed and HTML is sent back to the browser."

But although HTML is widely used, it has several deficiencies, largely stemming from its origins as a no-frills tool rather than a power user’s panacea.

"When there was only one Web browser and one operating system, the task of developing HTML that would render on the device appropriately was straightforward," Pinnacle Decision Systems emerging technology specialist Michael Pelletier told NewsFactor. In contrast, he said, "When new browsers, implementing different features on different operating systems with different screen resolutions, became the norm, the process by which the developer created the HTML content became exceedingly difficult."

Fortunately, standards that complement HTML, such as cascading style sheets (CSS), have helped developers reduce the burden of complex Web site maintenance. For example, a Web developer using CSS might be able to tweak

the design of an entire site by changing a single style sheet, rather than by changing design elements on each page of the site.

"CSS allows the developer to compartmentalize positioning and aesthetic markup information, creating documents that are both easier to read and easier to maintain," Ashley Warren, a Web developer at Adamson Advertising in St. Louis, Missouri, told NewsFactor. So important is this design tool that "the penetration of cascading style sheets throughout the development community will have one of the largest impacts on the future coding of Web sites."

Alongside standards like CSS, complementary markup languages also have evolved -- most notably XML, or extensible markup language.

"XML and HTML are independent and complementary," Offutt said. "HTML describes how to present data, and XML describes the content of data."

As such, the two languages solve different problems.

"The primary problem with HTML is that a single HTML page is an aggregation of both data to be displayed to the user and processing instructions for the browser as to how it should be rendered," Pelletier explained. "By separating the data from the rendered display and storing it in an XML document, we can utilize the same information over and over."

Two models have arisen for developers working with XML, according to Vernon Imrich, chief technology officer of Massachusetts-based Percussion Software. "One called 'DOM,' or Document Object Model, provides an object-oriented interface, so that the XML structures can be processed in familiar Web programming environments, such as JSP (Java) and ASP (VB and VB.Net)," he explained.

But "writing native DOM code from scratch can be daunting," Imrich added. The second approach, which uses a technology called XSLT (extensible stylesheet language transformations), "provides a very powerful conversion capability, which can be plugged into any type of application, providing the ability to rapidly change the presentation or to add new presentation channels -- without recoding the entire application."

Rather than replacing HTML, XML "will help to extend the life of HTML considerably as a presentation markup language," Imrich concluded. "It is far easier to convert XML into HTML than [into] any other formats, because of the fundamental similarities."

In fact, "the next generation of HTML markup is what is called XHTML," Pelletier explained. "XHTML is the convergence of XML and HTML in a standardized fashion."

Used in tandem with CSS, XHTML allows designers "to more easily repurpose the same content for multiple display types," Web developer Jeff Campbell of DreamHost Web Hosting told NewsFactor, "whether they be standard computer monitors, small PDA displays or screen readers for the visually impaired. Only a single copy of the content is needed."

So, even though Web designers will have to master some new tools in the future, they will do so in slow and evolutionary -- rather than revolutionary -- steps, according to Campbell. HTML is not likely to find itself out in the cold anytime soon.

Coders will have to stay sharp, however, by mastering XML -- and XML

conversion.

"XML-aware conversion languages, such as XSLT, will become critical to converting XML into human-readable pages," Imrich said. "Developers and designers who master these languages will have a critical leg up in the marketplace."

Unlike in the TV show "X-Files," what you see is what you will get in the brave new world of Internet "X" files, Alden Hart, CTO of the Adrenaline Group, told NewsFactor.

"Ultimately, new tools will generate the styles from the WYSIWYG design layer, so XML/XSLT won't change the skill set for many designers," Hart explained. "However, to do more advanced things and to debug pages, XML and XSLT will be a core skill set that is required."

Fighting Spam Becomes Top Priority

They haven't always been on top of the problem. But, as the volume of e-mail spam hits epidemic proportions -- not to mention a new level of raunchiness -- the makers of Internet security products are starting to take more notice.

And consumers, having long bemoaned the lack of recourse to the mass mailings on everything from a pre-approved mortgage to prescription-free Viagra, finally have some tools at their disposal that may at least ease the problem -- even if they can't nip it altogether.

"There are solutions out there that are helping people and I don't think they know about them yet," said Ray Everett Church, chief privacy officer of EPrivacy Group, and co-author of the book "Internet Privacy for Dummies."

"As a result, they are now spending two or three more times hitting the delete key than they did a year ago," he said.

Along with a multitude of small companies making products specifically designed to fight spam, larger software companies such as McAfee and Symantec Corp have started to weigh in.

Earlier this year, McAfee acquired SpamKiller from a Norwegian software maker, and incorporated it into its suite of security products. Like many of the newer spam filters coming onto the market, the McAfee solution goes beyond simply blocking suspicious keywords. It attempts to look at the overall context of the message, so it can, for example, distinguish between a recipe, a health-care site and a porn pitch in e-mails that contain the word "breast."

"It was back in January, when we were having some planning meetings, that we decided the anti-spam market was something that was going to explode," said Bryson Gordon, product line manager for McAfee. "It is very similar to how the anti-virus market started in the early 1980s. Spam is evolving from being a mere nuisance to being a security threat."

How bad has the spam epidemic become?

A recent story on the online technology news site Wired.com summed up the

assortment of offensive, unsolicited material this way: "Naked women performing oral sex with guns pressed to their heads, naked women with large dogs clutching their backs, naked women in pigtails pretending to be daughters having sex with their fathers."

As unseemly as that sounds, some companies say that shocking ordinary Internet users, or robbing youngsters of their innocence are not the only dangers posed by spam.

A growing number of the more than 500,000 identity and credit card thefts that occur online each year, are being accomplished through spam, experts say.

The typical method is to send an unsuspecting customer an offer for a product and instruct them to click onto a link contained in the mailing. That lands them on another site where they are asked to enter personal information such as name, address and credit card number.

"Prior to the spam epidemic, people would have to rummage through your garbage to get this information," said Gordon. "Now they are simply sending out 30 million emails in an attempt to defraud." He said when McAfee did some market research earlier this year to determine where to focus its new product development, the No. 1 request from customers was for an anti-spam tool.

For Symantec, an impetus for entering the anti-spam market was the glut of mailings received by its own staffers.

Anson Lee, product manager for Norton Internet Security, said that without filtering, spam accounts for about 80 percent of all the email he receives.

Symantec’s new security software -- Norton Internet Security 2003, hitting store shelves this month -- includes a feature called Norton Spam Alert. Like the McAfee product, it promises to consider the overall context of the message rather than only scanning for certain keywords.

Such an approach can help avoid "false positives," or blocking legitimate emails, a tricky problem that is one of the reasons fighting spam has posed such a challenge.

Getting the upper hand over spammers, Lee said, has become something of a cat-and-mouse game, in which spammers routinely change content in order to circumvent filters. Many have become adept at disguising their mailings with legitimate messages in the header field, or even by formatting the entire message to look like a subscription-based newsletter.

Church, of the EPrivacy Group, said that some of the newer anti-spam software products appear to be winning the race against the spammers, at least for now. He said he tested another filter made by the San Francisco company Cloudmark.com, and found that it caught between 70 and 90 percent of all incoming spam.

Still, he said that ridding the entire Internet of spam may ultimately take more than technology.

"At the end of the day, it is going to be more than just a technical fix. You’ve got to stop spammers at the source and that is going to require policy changes and new laws."

Could Your Boss Find Pirated Software on Your PC?

File swapping aficionados beware. Those MP3s you've been storing on your office computer could soon catch the attention of your network administrator and may even bring the wrath of the legal department down upon your head.

On Tuesday, Macrovision, a maker of digital copyright protection technology and Websense, a maker of employee Internet management software, announced a strategic partnership to develop tools for locating pirated files on corporate and government networks, according to a statement released by the two companies.

The partnership is a response to heightened concern among corporations that they could be the target of lawsuits filed by industry groups such as the Recording Industry Association of America or the Motion Picture Association of America when company resources are used to download, store, or distribute pirated content.

The RIAA and Integrated Information Systems of Tempe, Arizona, acknowledged in April that IIS had agreed to pay the RIAA $1 million in damages when it was discovered that employees used a company server to share pirated MP3 files.

"This is a self-fulfilling prophecy," says Kian Saneii, vice president of business development at Websense of San Diego, California.

"As the MPAA and RIAA make an issue of this, people will get sued and have to fork over money. All you need is a few lawsuits in order for people to say 'I need this [software] to sleep well at night.'"

For Websense, which works in a sector it calls 'employee Internet management' or 'EIM,' the partnership with Macrovision is just one phase of an expansion of their Websense Enterprise product from an Internet access management application working at the network edge to a content management application that sanitizes both the employee's desktop and online environments.

"Employees' [computers] are now basically home entertainment centers. Our customers were saying 'the computing environment is bigger than the [Web] browser. Your product is not letting them get to gaming [Web] sites, but they're playing Doom or Solitaire or instant messaging all day long,'" Saneii says.

Websense's desktop client will monitor user activity on the desktop and manage that activity according to policies set forth by the company and network administrator, much like its Internet management software does for Web browsing, according to Saneii. Application, port, and protocol level activity associated with network games, peer-to-peer applications, or instant messaging can all be tracked, logged, and locked down.

The integration of Macrovision's SafeDisc and SafeScan digital rights management technology with Websense makes it possible to determine whether a particular media file is a legal copy, or whether it is pirated code, according to Saneii.

"We need to know, if an employee has the 'Star Wars' DVD on their hard

drive, if it’s a copyright protected version of ’Star Wars’ that they legally purchased online, or a hacked version--and if it’s a hacked version, whether they’re distributing it," Saneii says.

Still, the liability of companies for the actions of their employees in handling pirated material is still an open question, says Jonathan Zittrain, assistant professor of law at Harvard University Law School and co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society.

He sees the introduction of monitoring technology such as that being developed by Websense and Macrovision as a development that benefits copyright holders more than companies and their employees.

"My sense is ’score one for the content publishers’," says Zittrain.

"It represents an education that has taken place with content publishers and the companies that market to them about the topography of the Internet--a very intelligent view of the different bottlenecks along the path from one music lover to another."

Harvard’s Zittrain also wonders whether companies such as Websense and Macrovision aren’t tapping a more general anxiety about viruses and spam e-mail in the corporate sphere to push what is otherwise intrusive software.

"This comes at a propitious moment for content publishers. You have a convergence in the workplace environment of a desire to build firewalls and virus scanners and a desire, because of concerns about sex harassment, to filter e-mails to prevent pornography. It’s brilliant to call [the joint product] a ’liability protector.’ Who wouldn’t want to buy a liability protector?"

Websense’s Saneii doesn’t see his product as an infringement on personal liberties. The policies enforced by Websense’s technology, he points out, are most often spelled out in the employee handbook.

"We don’t make value judgements. We make enabling technologies," Saneii says.

And, with Websense’s software controlling activities on the desktop, employers won’t have to worry about personally policing their employees - the software will do it for them.

According to Saneii, Websense and Macrovision have performed proof-of-concept tests integrating SafeScan with the Websense product, but don’t expect to have a product to market before the second quarter of 2003.

Pricing for the new technology has also not been set, though Saneii suggests that the company was considering a number of options including rolling Macrovision’s technology into Websense’s existing per-seat subscription service, adding it as a separate premium service for existing customers on top of the Websense Enterprise product, or giving the service away for free on a trial basis.

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